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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KPAL](#) [EG](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: EGYPT-GAZA BORDER UPDATE: JANUARY 27

REF: A. CAIRO 123
[1](#)B. CAIRO 124

Classified By: CDA Stuart E. Jones for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary -----

[1](#)1. (C) As of January 27, Palestinians continued to come and go from Egypt without undergoing customs or immigration procedures for the fifth consecutive day while security forces attempted to control only parts of the border and to limit visiting Palestinians' movement to the area between Al Arish city and the border. 33 police and two border guards remain hospitalized, several in intensive care, with wounds suffered during border confrontations with Palestinians. Egyptian MFA and MoD sources said that Egypt is working to reach a diplomatic solution to the border situation and hopes the Palestinians will leave Egypt on their own accord so that security forces will not need to use additional force to expel them. End summary.

Security update -----

[1](#)2. (C) On January 27, Palestinians crossed the Egypt-Gaza border for the fifth consecutive day since the breach of the border wall. Egypt's 750 Border Guard Forces and over 1,000 Central Security Forces attempted to control only limited segments of the border and to limit the movement of Palestinians to the area between Al Arish city and the border. A MoD official said that on January 26 security arrested five unarmed Palestinians at border marker 88, and another three at border marker 18. The group arrested at border marker 88 carried a large amount of dollars and shekels, as well as a large number of cell phones. The official said security believes that those arrested intended to enter Israel. The official also said security had arrested "several" Palestinians carrying explosive belts in the Rafah area. MFA Spokesman Hosam Zaki told Charge d'Affaires on January 27 that security had found one explosive belt in a taxi.

[1](#)3. (C) Since the initial border breach, Egyptian security has seized at least 1.5 tons of TNT, the official said. He said that representatives of the full range of Egypt's security services are deployed in the Sinai, but officials are concerned that a number of potential terrorists may have entered Egypt in recent days. Security has arrested "a number" (NFI) of Palestinians en route to the Suez Canal, a source said. The source said he did not know how many Palestinians may have crossed the Suez Canal.

[1](#)4. (C) A MoD official said that security services in the

Sinai now have multi-purpose (smoke plus fume) grenades and rubber bullets. They hope to reach an arrangement by which the Palestinians leave Egypt on their own accord, so that security forces can avoid resorting to additional force to expel them. MFA Spokesman Zaki told CDA that 33 police are currently hospitalized due to injuries, including stab wounds, suffered during the confrontations of recent days. Five of the 33 are in intensive care. Two border guards who were shot on January 25 remain hospitalized. As of January 27, security services still had not received an order to round up or expel Palestinians from Egypt.

Efforts towards a diplomatic solution

15. (C) MFA and MoD sources said Egypt wishes to resolve the Gaza border situation diplomatically and that arrangements to reopen the Rafah border crossing should be part of the solution. Late on January 26, MFA Spokesman Zaki passed CDA a verbal note from FM Aboul Gheit to the Secretary describing Egypt's efforts to resolve the situation diplomatically. (Note: CDA's January 27 meeting with Zaki on the status of efforts to resolve the border situation will be reported septel. End note). The full text of the verbal message follows:

Begin text:

Verbal Message

To: Condoleezza Rice

From: Ahmed Aboul Gheit

1) I trust you have been following the dramatic events which have, and are still, taking place over the borders of Egypt with the Gaza Strip. The flow of Palestinians into Egypt was swift and intense. We estimate that over 600,000 people have crossed the border.

2) This outburst of civilians into Egypt came as a direct result of the difficult, if not impossible, miserable living conditions of the Palestinian population inside the Strip as well as of the intolerable measures of collective punishment imposed by Israel, the Occupying Power. Therefore, in our view, Israel bears the ultimate responsibility for this sad humanitarian situation and its consequences.

3) Egypt, understanding the suffering that civilians have been put through and in view of its responsibilities toward the Palestinian people and cause, absorbed the human flow in spite of the many difficulties and potential problems and treated individuals with patience, wisdom and due respect. It was our declared position from the beginning that this flow was, due to the dire humanitarian situation, an exception which will have to come to a quick end. That is why Egyptian authorities are at present enforcing, in a gradual manner, measures to control the borders until the people who crossed into Egypt go back to their homes. Egypt is currently contemplating all options which will enable it to quickly control the consequences of this human flow.

4) In light of these events, and as they are gradually being contained, Egypt's strong preference is that an arrangement must be reached as soon as possible in order to allow for the reopening of the Rafah crossing. This should allow for a much needed "breathing room" for the population of the Strip and should prevent any future similar human flows from happening.

5) The European Union is part to the 2005 agreement on the Gaza crossings. I have raised with Mr. Solana and with Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner the issue of the redeployment of EU observers in the crossings, in particular Rafah, along with representatives of the Palestinian Authority.

6) Egypt is undertaking contacts with the PA and Hamas in order to bring both to agree on steps that would allow the re-opening of the crossings. This will inevitably include elements that should enable Israel to agree to allow the arrangement to be implemented.

7) I am hopeful that you will lend your support to our endeavor. If reached, and arrangement of the sort can represent an introduction to a period of calm that will enable all of us to focus on the real substantive efforts of peacemaking between Israelis and Palestinians. I further hope that you succeed to convince the Israelis that they should no longer resort to measures of collective punishment which result in worsening an already dire humanitarian situation as we have seen. I am looking forward to receiving your comments and examining the whole issue further with you over a phone call.

End text

JONES